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ABSTRACT

An educational leadership program that combines student portfolios and an educational platform as student assessment measures is described in this paper. Beginning with a brief discussion of the purposes and mechanics of portfolios and platforms, the paper then describes how these assessment measures are integrated into an educational leadership program. The program is composed of diverse assessment activities that are integrated with five core learning experiences, specialized courses, and an administrative internship. Program success depends on faculty consensus, clearly defined responsibility, and constant monitoring and adjusting. One figure depicting the process is included. (15 references) (LMI)

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Incorporating Alternative Assessment Measures in an Educational Leadership Preparation Program: Portfolios and Educational Platforms

A growing debate in the educational community is the viability of using standardized tests as the sole measure of student learning. Advocates of such tests claim they provide comparable information for large numbers of students. As a result of this confidence in such tests, many states and school districts are making important decisions based on standardized test results, including firing superintendents for low test scores, providing merit pay to teachers whose students have high scores, and allocating additional funds to schools that have higher scores than expected.

At the same time, however, standardized tests are coming under fire from a variety of fronts. Among the problems identified by researchers and practitioners are the test's focus on basic skills, the limitation of the breadth and depth of content tested, and the emphasis on correct answers rather than the process used in solving a problem (Shepard, 1989). In addition, tests do not always allow students to demonstrate how they can apply knowledge to real-life situations. Therefore, it is argued that students need opportunities to assess their own learning, especially if they are to become self-directed learners.

In addressing the problems associated with standardized tests, recent attention has focused on alternative assessment measures, particularly those which allow students to provide authentic evidence of their acquired competencies, skills, and knowledge. The intent of authentic assessement is for students to demonstrate not only **what** they have learned, but also **how** they acquired a particular skill or piece of knowledge. Such an approach permits students to take control of their own learning by determining how they will demonstrate their knowledge rather than waiting for teachers to dictate what form their learning must take.

Recently, many educators are striving to authentically assess student peformance by having learners from grade school to higher education create **portfolios**. Simply put, a portfolio is a collection of materials that students compile to demonstrate their ongoing developmental knowledge and to take an active role in the learning process. By documenting their experiences, students focus on their accomplishments rather than their deficiencies.

This paper contends that portfolios are a viable assessment and professional development activity to incorporate in an educational leadership preparation program. When created in conjuction with an educational platform (Sergiovanni and Starratt,

1983), the author argues that portfolios provide a means for aspiring school leaders to demonstrate the beliefs and values espoused in their platforms. Beginning with a brief discussion of the purposes and mechanics of portfolios and platforms, the paper then describes how these assessment measures can be integrated into an educational leadership preparation program, using the new program developed at the University of Northern Colorado as an example.

Promising assessment measures: portfolios and educational platforms

Portfolios. The creation of portfolios is becoming an accepted practice in higher education in several ways. First, colleges and universities are encouraging students to develop portfolios in order to receive undergraduate credit for prior learning experiences (Barba, Carrolton, and Yeaw, 1984; Kemp, Smith, and Van Sant, 1984; Weissman, 1984). In many instances, adult students' life experiences do not fit with course descriptions and undergraduate curriculum; however, by providing them with guidelines for portfolio creation, students supply information which can be evaluated by faculty to determine the overlap with the program curriculum. Second, portfolios are being used to assess student learning during their undergraduate program of studies. For example, colleges of business are using portfolios to assess problem solving, communication skills, and metacognitive processing; history departments are asking students to complete portfolios consisting of several course assignments, a research paper, and an autobiographical essay; colleges of education are incorporating portfolios to document students' growth, multicultural sensitivity, and insights gained from their field experiences (Hutchings, 1990).

In documenting either earlier life experiences or program learning objectives, a distinction is sometimes made between a **folio** and a **portfolio** (MacIsaac, n.d.). A folio consists of a wide variety of materials, referred to as artifacts, that students collect as they are completing an educational experience. The portfolio is constructed from the folio by selecting only those artifacts which demonstrate a particular learning or accomplishment. Typically, the final set of artifacts are accompanied by a reflective statement indicating why each item is included and how it reflects the accomplishment of a goal. In this sense, students do not simply provide an activity record of their experiences, but include "learning competence statements" in which they claim some level of expertise along with supporting evidence (Forrest, 1977).

A variety of artifacts have been suggested as appropriate for inclusion in a portfolio. Among the most common of these artifacts are:

1. A professional development plan.
2. A resume.
3. A brief autobiography.
4. A statement of philosophy.
5. Transcripts of college coursework.
6. Certificates, honors, and awards.
7. Letters of recommendation.
8. Professional memberships and organizations.
9. Written correspondence.
10. Samples of assignments or work completed such as demonstrations, exhibitions, test results, journals, and videotapes (Barba et al., 1984; Kemp et al., 1984; MacIssac, n.d.; Weissman, 1984).

Of these examples of artifacts, the first nine capture personal background information, whereas the final item--assignments and work completed--provides specific evidence of learning experiences and how they reflect a particular goal. While samples of assignments and work completed might always be included in a portfolio, depending on the particular purpose for which a portfolio is being constructed, some of the other nine items may not be appropriate for inclusion.

In deciding the contents of a portfolio, a determination must be made of who will be assessing the student's performance and for what purpose. Several different assessment purposes might be appropriate. For example, **self-assessment** would permit students to examine their folio of artifacts and determine how they have changed or grown as a result of their learning experiences. These artifacts might focus on particular elements included in their professional development plan. Furthermore, if **program assessment** is the intent, then students would compile artifacts that represent the desired program objectives or outcomes. This form of assessment can be used throughout the program of studies to ascertain progress as well as at the conclusion of the program to determine the extent to which students have accomplished certain programmatic requirements. As students complete the program, a "transition conference" (Hulsart, 1990) can be held to help them determine how their strengths and weaknesses relate to future career aspirations. Finally, for an **external assessment** students would collect those artifacts that best represent their competencies and skills when seeking employment. Knowing specific job requirements and qualifications can guide the types of artifacts to include in this type of portfolio.

Educational platforms. The educational platform, as advocated by Sergiovanni and Starratt (1983), is a way for a person to articulate his/her philosophy of

education. In this sense, the platform becomes a self-assessment mechanism for people to express their personal beliefs and values. Several formats for platform development have been advocated. For example, platforms might address such topics as the aims of education, the value of the curriculum, the preferred kind of pedagogy, and the preferred kind of teacher-student relationship (Sergiovanni and Starratt, 1983). In addition, Barnett (1991; in press) contends that platforms be constructed focusing such issues as the desired student outcomes to the preferred school climate to the expectations for community involvement in the school.

Regardless of the particular format endorsed, professors of educational administration are beginning to incorporate platform development into individual courses and programs of study (Barnett, 1991; Daresh, 1989; Kottkamp, 1982, 1990). Some programs are encouraging students to create platforms and to compare their stated beliefs with actual behaviors observed during simulation exercises (Kottkamp, 1982). Others have advocated applying the information contained in platforms by assisting students as they prepare for job interviews, communicate important ideas with the teaching staff, and determine mutual areas of interest and concern with mentors with whom they work (Barnett, in press). Not only can platforms be useful during their preparation program, but there is evidence that platforms have positive effects on students long after they have completed their program of studies (Kottkamp, 1990).

Integrating assessment activities into preparation programs

As the foregoing description indicates, the educational platform represents peoples' beliefs and values about schools and learning, providing what Argyris and Schon (1975) refer to as their "espoused theory of action." The statements and contentions made in platforms refer to how people would like to be viewed and behave which may not always match how they actually behave. Therefore, an espoused theory may conflict with a "theory in use" which are the actual behaviors that people display (Argyris and Schon, 1975). Often, discrepancies exist between a person's espoused theory and his/her theory in action, highlighting the distinction between what people say and do.

If platforms are a means for expressing espoused theories, then the portfolio becomes the medium for demonstrating theories in use. In this sense, platforms and portfolios can be integrally linked to ascertain how well espoused values match with actual behaviors. In the field of educational administration there has been some interest in examining the relationship between what is espoused in an educational platform and **simulated** behaviors (Kottkamp, 1982); however, there has been no work completed

which allows students to systematically document their actual learning experiences and compare them with what is respresented in their educational platforms. Therefore, outlined below is a structure for how the educational leadership preparation program at the University of Northern Colorado is considering incorporating educational platforms and portfolios as an alternative assessment processes. To set the context of the program, a brief description of the core learning experiences is provided. Following this overview, the manner in which platforms and portfolios are envisioned being used as well as the precautions in attempting such a process are discussed.

Core learning experiences. Rather than offer the traditional set of courses included in a typical educational administration program such as school law, finance, supervision, and school-community relations, the UNC program is organized around five core learning experiences. These experiences integrate knowledge from a variety of disciplines with field experiences to blend theory and practice. This knowledge base consists of:

1. **Understanding Self: Developing a Personal Vision for Educational Leadership** allows students to develop an appreciation of their values and attitudes and how these beliefs relate to governance, administration and leadership, and curriculum development.
2. **Using Inquiry: Framing Problems and Making Decisions in Educational Leadership** examines alternative ways of knowing and framing issues that are frequently used by school leaders and to develop an awareness of how these alternative perspectives relate to leadership in organizations.
3. **Shaping Organizations: Management and Leadership in Education** includes experiences aimed at understanding the structural components of educational organizations, theoretical frameworks that describe organizational behavior, and relationships between schools and other organizations.
4. **Understanding People: Professional Development and Educational Leadership** explores issues related to personnel development in educational organizations, adult learning and development, and staff appraisal.
5. **Understanding Environments: Social, Political, Economic, and Legal Influences** focuses on how demography, cultural diversity, politics, governance, law, and finance influence policies and operations and the ways in which educators can impact these external environments.

After having engaged in these five core learning experiences and their associated field experiences, students broaden their knowledge base by taking specialized courses in such areas as leadership, curriculum and instruction, evaluation, supervision, law, and staff

development. Finally, an administrative internship permits students to observe and practice the functions and duties associated with school leadership, while applying the concepts incorporated in the coursework previously taken.

Incorporating diverse assessment measures. As envisioned in this program, the educational platform and portfolios become important formative and summative assessment processes to assist students in determining their progress and future directions as educational leaders. Using the notions developed by Argyris and Schon (1975), the educational platform becomes a self-assessment device allowing students to articulate their **espoused theory** while the portfolio serves as the mechanism which enables them to demonstrate their **theory in action**. In order for these assessment measures to be helpful in these ways, they must be integrated into the overall curriculum and course delivery. The manner in which this integration occurs is outlined in Figure 1.

The figure indicates at which points in the program platforms and portfolios are created and reviewed. To begin with, an educational platform is created during students' first core learning experience, Understanding Self (platform #1). The purpose of this initial version of a platform is for students to articulate their espoused beliefs and values, to identify a professional development plan outlining what they hope to accomplish during the program, and to determine the types of artifacts they will collect to demonstrate their beliefs, values, and elements of the professional development plan. In this sense, the first version of the platform becomes an advanced organizer which guides students in the types of experiences and materials they envision helping them demonstrate their espoused values and goals.

Once this plan of operation has been initially formulated, it is revised and instituted through subsequent versions of the platform and through the creation of a portfolio. As Figure 1 shows, the ongoing versions of the platform are created during each of the remaining core learning experiences, using the objectives and learning activities associated with the particular core area to reshape the ideals expressed in the platform (platforms #2 - #5). The portfolio is created over the entire duration of a student's program as well. For instance, an initial portfolio is developed and submitted (portfolio review #1) once students take the second core learning experience (e.g., Using Inquiry). This portfolio is organized using the students' espoused values from their platforms as well as the goals and objectives outlined for the course. Furthermore, as students engage in the remaining core learning experiences, they accumulate additional materials relevant to their desired goals and course objectives (portfolio reviews #2 - #4). Opportunities are provided for students to orally share their portfolios so they can obtain

feedback from their student peers about the content of their portfolios as well as their presentation styles.

After completing the last core learning experience, a final platform and portfolio are developed and submitted to the program faculty. Not only does the final platform contain the cummulative changes represented in platform versions #1 - #5, but also is the opportunity for students to determine how their platform ideals have changed or been reinforced based on their ongoing academic and professional experiences. In conjuction with this final platform, the final portfolio is submitted for review. This final version is different in several respects. First, students create a continuing professional development plan using their insights gained from participation in the program. Such a plan reinforces the importance of life-long learning. Second, the final portfolio is presented to an external audience of practitioners and faculty. In addition to providing students with opportunities to express their ideas verbally, this activity stresses students' ability to communicate their goals and aspirations as school leaders, an important skill to possess as they begin to interview for vacant administrative positions and to work with other adult educators.

Precautions. The plan for incorporating alternative assessment procedures described above is a major undertaking for both students and faculty. Besides the typical types of activities contained in graduate coursework, students would be required to prepare an ongoing series of written materials. Although guidelines are provided for platform and portfolio development, students have many degrees of freedom in how to compile and present their materials. This freedom will be welcomed by many students; however, those students who are accustomed to professors soley dictating the form in which their learning should take place may experience some confusion and frustration.

Not only are the expectations for student performance increased by such an assessment system, but faculty members in educational administration departments also would have to infuse new ideas into their teaching and devote more time to the program. Individually, professors who teach the core learning experiences would need to familiarize themselves with platforms and portfolios before incorporating them into their course assignments. For those unfamiliar with these processes, a staff development program would need to be instituted prior to implementation. Because these processes cannot be merely added on, professors need to understand how they can be connected to the learning goals and objectives of their courses. Collectively, faculty would need to be willing to give the time needed to review portfolios, attend oral presentations, and provide written and verbal feedback to students. This is particularly

true in reviewing the final versions of the portfolios when students orally present their materials to a group of practitioners and faculty.

Finally, in order to determine if these assessment activities are having any demonstrable influence on students' actions and attitudes, obtaining the reactions of students and faculty will be necessary. For example, informal interviews might be conducted with students and faculty to uncover their perceptions about the influence platforms and portfolios are having on their professional formation as school leaders. In addition, follow-up interviews might be scheduled and questionnaires distributed to former program participants to uncover the long-term effects of these assessment processes. To date, little empirical data of this type exists; however, there is emerging evidence that platforms do have a lasting influence on students who participated in an educational administration preparation program (Kottkamp, 1990).

Due to the extra time and effort required to infuse these assessment processes into the curriculum, the entire university faculty needs to agree that they are worth incorporating on at least a trial basis. To expect one or two professors to implement such a process would greatly jeapordize the chances that these assessment mechanisms will become the institutionalized policy and operating procedures for the department. Therefore, the costs, benefits, and shared responsibilities associated with such an endeavor must be clearly articulated prior to implementation. Once these measures are incorporated, however, constant monitoring and adjusting need to occur to ensure these assessment processes are meeting the goals of the program and the needs of students.

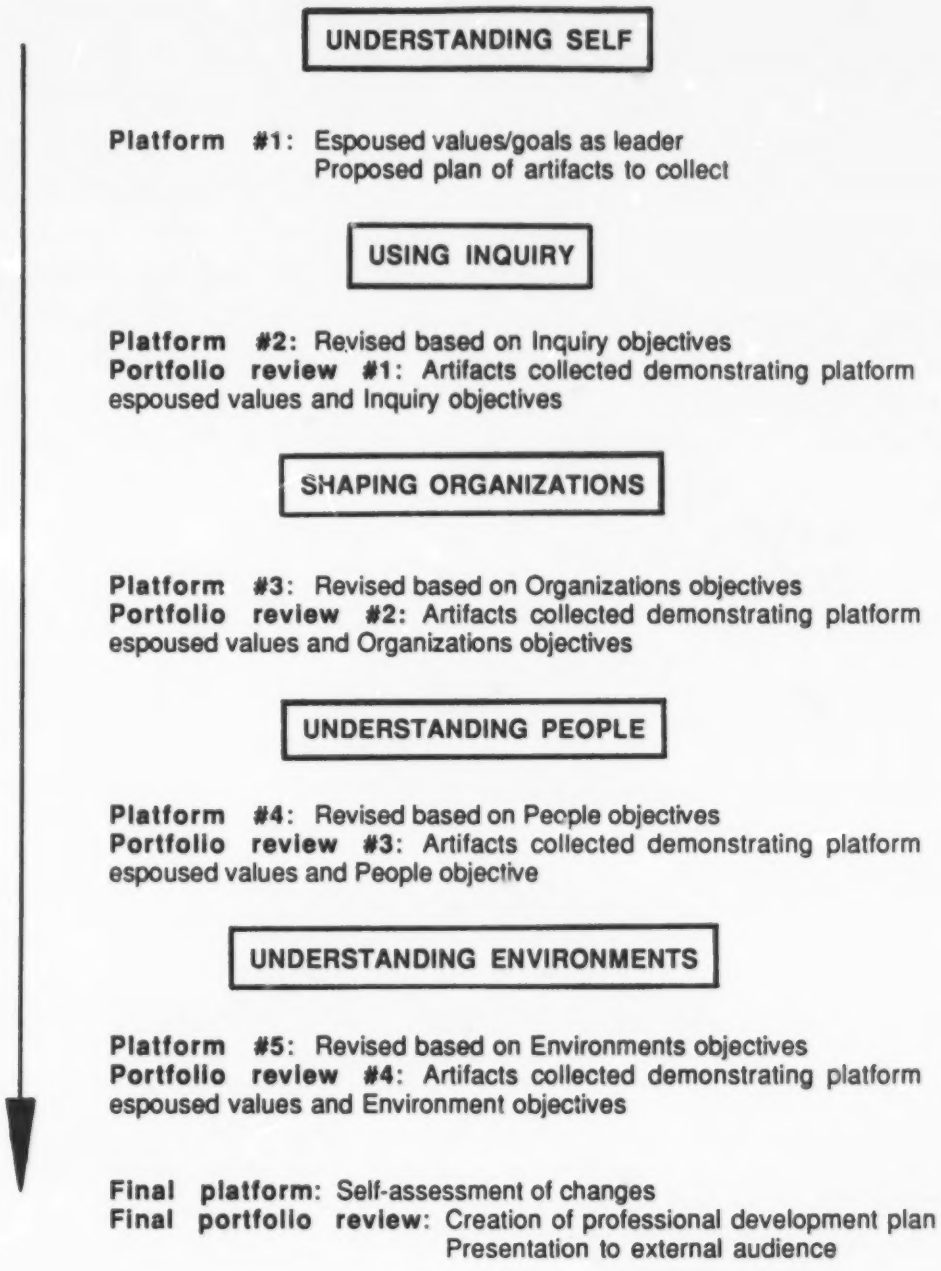
UNDERSTANDING SELF
Platform #1: Espoused values/goals as leader
Proposed plan of artifacts to collect
USING INQUIRY
Platform #2: Revised based on Inquiry objectives
Portfolio review #1: Artifacts collected demonstrating platform espoused values and Inquiry objectives
SHAPING ORGANIZATIONS
Platform #3: Revised based on Organizations objectives
Portfolio review #2: Artifacts collected demonstrating platform espoused values and Organizations objectives
UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE
Platform #4: Revised based on People objectives
Portfolio review #3: Artifacts collected demonstrating platform espoused values and People objective
UNDERSTANDING ENVIRONMENTS
Platform #5: Revised based on Environments objectives
Portfolio review #4: Artifacts collected demonstrating platform espoused values and Environment objectives
Final platform: Self-assessment of changes
Final portfolio review: Creation of professional development plan
Presentation to external audience

Figure 1. The Integration of Assessment Activities with Program Core Learning Experiences

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